

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TOKYO 02798 01 OF 03 010851Z
ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
ACDA-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IO-13 /076 W
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R 010749Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5773
INFO AMEMBASSY SEOUL
CINCPAC HONOLULU HAWAII

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TOKYO 2798

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: JA, US, KS, PFOR
SUBJ: JAPANESE DEBATE CONTINUES ON TROOP REDUCTIONS IN ROK

REF: TOKYO 2291

SUMMARY: PUBLIC DEBATE ABOUT ROK TROOP REDUCTIONS HAS BEEN RELATIVELY LOW-KEY AND FREE FROM ACRIMONY BUT ISSUE CONTINUES TO ENGAGE PROMINENT CONCERN IN ALL POLITICAL QUARTERS, TOUCHING AS IT DOES ON POPULAR FEAR OF WAR, JAPANESE SECURITY, AND JAPAN'S RELATIONS WITH ITS MOST IMPORTANT ALLY AND ITS CLOSEST ASIAN NEIGHBOR. JAPANESE PRESS HAS BEEN EAGER TO SEIZE UPON ANY STORY OR COMMENT. IN LARGE PART RESTRAINT IN DISCUSSION HAS BEEN RESULT OF FUKUDA GOVERNMENT'S SKILLFUL DEFINITION OF TERMS UPON WHICH DEBATE HAS THUS FAR BEEN CONDUCTED. PRIVATE COMMENTS TO EMBOFFS INDICATE, HOWEVER, THAT CONSIDERABLE MISGIVING PERSISTS JUST BELOW THE SURFACE, AT LEAST IN CONSERVATIVE QUARTERS, ABOUT IMPLICATIONS OF DECISION TO WITHDRAW TROOPS FOR GENERAL US POSTURE IN ASIA. ARGUMENTATION FOR CONTINUED US GROUND FORCES PRESENCE HAS NOW SURFACED IN FORM OF REPORT BY MICHITA SAKATA, FORMER JDA HEAD AND CHAIRMAN OF LDP SECURITY RESEARCH COUNCIL. OPPOSITION HAS NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO TURN
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 TOKYO 02798 01 OF 03 010851Z

WITHDRAWAL ISSUE TO GOVERNMENT'S DISADVANTAGE. END SUMMARY.

1. FUKUDA CABINET AND TOP BUREAUCRATS HAVE TREATED TROOP WITHDRAWAL ISSUE WITH CALCULATED CAUTION. CLEAR-CUT STATEMENT OF POLICY BEFORE US AND ROK HAVE EVEN BEGUN DISCUSSIONS ON WITHDRAWAL WOULD UNNECESSARILY RESTRICT GOVERNMENT'S FUTURE FLEXIBILITY BOTH INTERNATIONALLY AND DOMESTICALLY. ACCORDINGLY, GOJ SPOKESMEN HAVE STARTED

FROM STUDIOUSLY NEUTRAL DESCRIPTION OF JAPANESE INTERESTS, WHILE MAINTAINING ROOM FOR RESTATEMENT OR REVISION.

2. TAKEN TOGETHER, RECENT COMMENTS TO PRESS AND IN DIET OF PM FUKUDA, FONMIN HATOYAMA AND CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY SONODA CONTAIN FOLLOWING ELEMENTS:

- TROOP REDUCTION ISSE IS ESSENTIALLY BILATERAL QUESTION BETWEEN US AND ROK IN WHICH JAPAN WILL NOT INTERVENE;
- JAPAN MIGHT NEVERTHELESS EXPRESS ITS "OPINIONS" ON ISSUE;
- JAPAN IS "DEEPLY CONCERNED" THAT DELICATE BALANCE ON KOREAN PENINSULA UPON WHICH PEACE RESTS SHOULD NOT BE UPSET;
- WHILE MILITARY STRENGTH OF ROK IS IMPORTANT ELEMENT, THIS BALANCE IS NOT DEPENDENT SOLELY UPON MILITARY POWER BUT ALSO ON SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND DIPLOMATIC FACTORS;
- US HAS STATED THAT ANY REDUCTION OF TROOP LEVELS IN ROK WOULD BE GRADUAL AND PRECEDED BY CONSULTATIONS;
- JAPAN WOULD NOT OPPOSE MEASURED TROOP WITHDRAWAL;
- JAPAN, HOWEVER, HAS NOT YET AGREED TO US PLANS.

3. GOJ'S BALANCING ACT APPEARS TO BE MOTIVATED BY SEVERAL CONSIDERATIONS CALLING FOR CAUTIOUS PUBLIC POSTURE.

-- THERE IS GROWING PERCEPTION WITHIN TOKYO THAT BASIC US DECISION TO REDUCE TROOP LEVELS IN ROK HAS ALREADY BEEN MADE AND CANNOT BE CHANGED. DEEMING IT PROFITLESS, AND INDEED POLITICALLY UNWISE, TO OPPOSE US PUBLICLY AND VIGOROUSLY ON THIS ISSUE, GOJ IS GRADUALLY SLIDING INTO PUBLIC POSTURE OF PASSIVE ACQUIESCENCE IN INEVITABLE TROOP REDUCTIONS.

" GOJ IS AT PAINS NOT TO OFFEND ROK BY SPEAKING FOR ITS INTERESTS. WHILE ROK MAY BE TROUBLED BY STATIC IN ITS COMMUNICATION CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TOKYO 02798 01 OF 03 010851Z

WITH US THESE DAYS, AND MAY BE PLEASED TO HAVE GOJ CARRY SOME OF ITS ARGUMENTATION, FUKUDA IS AWARE THAT IF HE DOES SO TOO FORCEFULLY OR PUBLICLY HE SHOULD EXPECT NO ROK GRATITUDE.

-- TOO FORTHRIGHT AN EXPRESSION OF JAPANESE ANXIETY OVER KOREA'S FUTURE MIGHT ALSO PUSH JAPAN INTO POLITICALLY UNTENABLE ROLE OF INTIMATE INVOLVEMENT IN MAINTAINING SOUTH KOREAN SECURITY. KOREA IS UNIQUELY SENSITIVE ISSUE IN JAPANESE POLITICS -- AT ITS HEART IS DEEP-ROOTED FEAR THROUGHOUT JAPANESE POPULACE THAT EVENTS ON PENINSULA COULD EASILY DRAW JAPAN INTO ANOTHER WAR. SHOULD GOJ APPEAR TO BECOME ENMESHED IN DEFENSE OF ROK, OPPOSITION PARTIES WOULD BE QUICK TO PLAY UPON THIS FEAR.

-- FURTHERMORE, FUKUDA GOVERNMENT'S HOPES FOR BOTH STRONG CONSERVATIVE SHOWING IN UPPER HOUSE ELECTION AND SUCCESSFUL RELATIONS WITH OTHER WESTERN INDUSTRIAL STATES REST HEAVILY ON JAPANESE ECONOMIC RECOVERY. IN TURN, STIMULATION OF ECONOMY DEPENDS TO CONSIDERABLE DEGREE ON SPEEDY DIET PASSAGE OF BUDGET. WITH OPPOSITION THREAT OF DIET DISRUPTION ALWAYS PRESENT, IT HAS BECOME POLITICALLY IMPERATIVE THAT FUKUDA AND LDP MAINTAIN LOW PUBLIC PROFILE ON POLITICALLY CONTENTIOUS ISSUE OF TROOP REDUCTIONS AND KOREAN SECUR-

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PAGE 01 TOKYO 02798 02 OF 03 010902Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 3 TOKYO 2798

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

4. SO MUCH FOR GOJ'S PUBLIC POSITION. AS LONG AS MECHANICS OF TROOP REDUCTION AND, PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANTLY, MANNER IN WHICH PENINSULA'S STABILITY WOULD BE ENSURED THROUGH DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS ACCOMPANYING REDUCTIONS REMAIN UNCLEAR, HOWEVER, UNCERTAINTY AND CONCERN PREVAILS, PARTICULARLY AMONG JAPANESE CONSERVATIVES. IN PRIVATE CONVERSATIONS, NUMBER OF DIET MEMBERS FROM BOTH HOUSES HAVE TOLD EMB-OFFS THAT THEY WERE NOT SO MUCH UPSET BY IDEA OF WITHDRAWING US GROUND FORCES, PROVIDED ACTION WAS PHASED OVER SEVERAL YEARS, AS THEY WERE BY FEAR THAT US WAS REASSESSING ITS ASIAN POLICY AND MIGHT NOT REMAIN COMMITTED TO PROJECTION OF MILITARY POWER IN PACIFIC. THEY HAVE NOTED INTENTION TO STRENGTHEN US FORCES IN EUROPE, WHICH THEY READ IN CONTRAST TO WITHDRAWAL IN KOREA. WHILE THEY ACKNOWLEDGE THAT JAPANESE FEEL NO SENSE OF IMMINENT THREAT, THEY FEEL THIS IS BECAUSE UP TO NOW US STAYING POWER HAS NOT BEEN QUESTIONED, AND THEY SPECULATE ABOUT NATIONALIST SENTIMENT RISING TO SURFACE -- A PHENOMENON THEY WOULD NOT WELCOME -- SHOULD US MOVE TOO PRECIPITATELY.

5. MOST EXPLICIT PUBLIC PRESENTATION TO DATE OF JAPANESE CONCERN WAS CONTAINED IN DRAFT REPORT BY CHAIRMAN MICHITA SAKATA OF LDP SECURITY RESEARCH COUNCIL SLATED FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION MARCH 1
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 TOKYO 02798 02 OF 03 010902Z

BUT PUBLISHED IN PRESS FEBRUARY 26. SAKATA, WHO MADE MANY OF SAME POINTS IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH CHARGE, SPELLED OUT MILITARY CAPABILITIES OF PRESENT US GROUND FORCES; TERMED THEIR PRESENCE SYMBOL OF US DEFENSE COMMITMENTS TO OTHER NATIONS; AND SAID PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THEIR WITHDRAWAL WOULD BE GREAT. AIR FORCES WERE INADEQUATE SUBSTITUTE, AND THERE WOULD BE DANGER OF MISCALCULATION ON PART OF NORTH KOREA SIMILAR TO THAT FOLLOWING ACHESON STATEMENT JUST PRIOR TO KOREAN WAR. REPORT URGED THAT US HOLD EXHAUSTIVE CONSULTATIONS WITH ROK AND JAPAN OVER EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME DURING WHICH POLITICAL MOOD FOR PEACEFUL UNIFICATION SHOULD BE FOSTERED; IN MEANTIME JAPAN SHOULD DO MORE FOR OWN SELF DEFENSE. COMMENTING ON SAKATA REPORT, GEN MATSUO, DIRECTOR JOINT STAFF OFFICE, SAID FOR MOST PART IT FAITHFULLY REPRESENTED VIEWS OF ENTIRE JAPANESE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT, AS WELL AS JAPANESE PEOPLE. HE REGRETTED REFERENCE TO STRENGTHENING JAPANESE DEFENSE, HOWEVER, INASMUCH AS HE FEARED REPORT MIGHT BE MISINTERPRETED AS CONTRIVED FOR PRINCIPLE PURPOSE OF INCREASING DEFENSE BUDGET. (HE ALSO THOUGHT A TWO-KOREA SOLUTION, RATHER THAN UNIFICATION, WAS A REALISTIC GOAL.)

6. FOLLOWING LEAD OF THEIR PM, MOST CONSERVATIVES HAVE BEEN MORE RESTRAINED IN THEIR PUBLIC ACTIONS, KEEPING THEIR ANXIETY UNDER WRAPS NOT MERELY THROUGH PARTY DISCIPLINE IMPOSED FROM ABOVE BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF PERCEPTION THAT GREATER PRESSURE ON THEIR PART WOULD ONLY EMBARRASS THEIR OWN LEADER, FUKUDA, AND HARM PARTY'S ELECTORAL CHANGES. THUS FEBRUARY 16 ROK-JAPAN PARLIAMENTARIANS' CONFERENCE MERELY CALLED FOR "PRUDENCE" ON PART OF US IN HADLING TROOP WITHDRAWAL, WHEREAS PRIOR TO PARLIAMENTARIANS' MEETING THERE HAD BEEN INDICATIONS KOREAN PARTICIPANTS WOULD SEEK STRONGER LANGUAGE (REFTEL). JDA DIRGEN MIHARA HAS DOWNPLAYED SIGNIFICANCE OF TROOP REDUCTIONS IN DIET STATEMENTS, DESCRIBING THEM AS EXTENSIONS OF EARLIER NIXON DOCTRINE.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 01 TOKYO 02798 03 OF 03 010910Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 TOKYO 2798

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

7. FOR THEIR PART, OPPOSITION PARTIES HAVE FAILED TO TURN TROOP-WITHDRAWAL ISSUE TO GOVERNMENT'S DISADVANTAGE. IN DIET INTERPELLATIONS, THEY HAVE CONCENTRATED ON ALLEGATIONS OF KCIA MISDEEDS AND ROK-LDP PAYOFFS, WHILE THEIR QUESTIONING ON TROOP ISSUE HAS BEEN ALMOST PERFUNCTORY. IN VIEW OF THEIR STRONG DISTASTE FOR PARK REGIME, OPPOSITION PARTIES, WITH EXCEPTION OF DSP, HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO OPPOSE TROOP WITHDRAWAL PER SE; NOR HAVE THEY BEEN ABLE TO TAKE SERIOUS EXCEPTION TO FUKUDA'S EXPRESSION OF CONCERN THAT BALANCE ON KOREAN PENINSULA NOT BE UPSET.

8. FORCED TO SEARCH FOR ANOTHER HANDLE ON TROOP-WITHDRAWAL ISSUE, OPPOSITION HAS ENDED UP ECHOING FAMILIAR CHARGES, THUS FAR WITH RELATIVELY LITTLE EFFECT:

-- JSP DIET MEMBER HAS SUGGESTED THAT TROOPS AND TACTICAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS WITHDRAWN FROM SOUTH KOREA WOULD BE REDEPLOYED IN JAPAN.

-- HIDEO DEN OF JSP HAS ASSERTED THAT GOJ DROPPED EARLIER OBJECTIONS TO TROOP WITHDRAWAL AT URGING OF US. REVIVING OLD CHARGE THAT JAPANESE POLICY WAS SUBSERVIENT TO US DESIRES. (DEN'S ASSERTION BASED ON ALLEGED COMMENTS OF ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE AT FEBRUARY 18 MEETING IN WASHINGTON WAS QUICKLY DENIED BY CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY SONODA.)

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TOKYO 02798 03 OF 03 010910Z

-- SUBSEQUENTLY AT PRO-NORTH KOREAN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN BRUSSELS, DEN RAISED SPECTRE OF U-JAPAN-ROK COLLUSION, ACCUSING GOJ OF INTENDING TO REPLACE US IN SOUTH KOREA AS SURROGATE PROP OF REPRESSIVE SEOUL REGIME THROUGH EXPANDED ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE.

9. IT IS GENERALLY ANTICIPATED THAT NEXT MAJOR STEP IN ARTICULATION OF GOJ'S PUBLIC POLICY WILL LIKELY COME DURING PM FUKUDA'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN MID-MARCH, WHEN TROOP REDUCTIONS WILL BE DISCUSSED AND WORDING OF TRADITIONAL "ROK CLAUSE" IN JOINT COMMUNIQUE WILL HAVE TO BE WORKED OUT. PM FUKUDA HAS ALREADY TOLD DIET THAT ALTHOUGH SPECIFIC LANGUAGE MIGHT DIFFER, ANY NEW "ROK CLAUSE" WOULD FOLLOW "BASIC UNDERSTANDING" OF PREVIOUS COMMUNIQUE. WHILE WELL-SOURCED FEBRUARY 21 YOMIURI ARTICLE SUGGESTED THAT FONOFF MIGHT OPT FOR MORE DIRECT LINKAGE BETWEEN PEACE AND SECURITY OF ROK AND JAPAN THAN EXPRESSED IN MIKI-FORD COMMUNIQUE ROUNDABOUT FORMULATION, WITH EYE TOWARDS DOMESTIC POLITICS, FONOFF MIGHT ALSO SEEK TO AVOID SUCH LANGUAGE AS "VITAL" OR "NECESSARY" AS UNDULY OFFENSIVE TO OP-

POSITION PARTIES.

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Message Attributes

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